D.E. Thomas

The Psychological Approach to the Study of Prophecy

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THE PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF PROPHECY

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND LITERATURE IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

(THE GRADUATE DIVINITY SCHOOL: DEPARTMENT OF OLD TESTAMENT LITERATURE AND INTERPRETATION)

BY

DAVID EDWARD THOMAS

Reprinted, with additions, from
THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY, Vol. XVIII, No. 2
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The psychology of religion is no longer a new field of research. Within the last two decades, it has been pursued from various points of approach, and no one who has followed its development can question its contribution to the clearer understanding and deeper appreciation of religion in its relation to the whole mental life.

During these years both psychology and religion have been subjected to new scrutiny; a psychological method of dealing with religion has added zest in both fields of inquiry, and has produced interesting and stimulating results. These researches and their results have been of great practical value, especially in the province of child and adolescent religion.

But comparatively little has been done in the way of a scientific analysis and an attempted explanation of the special and higher forms of religious experience, as exhibited by the prophet or the mystic. The literature in this field is still scanty. Professor Ames[1] in his recent volume devotes a chapter to the psychology of religious genius. A. B. Davidson[2] has dealt specifically, though briefly, with some of the phases of this topic. George Adam Smith[3] in his commentaries on the prophets drops interesting hints of the possibilities in this line of research. Two more recent small volumes by Kaplan[4] and Joyce[5] show the tendency of the times. These books are in the nature of essays on the subject of prophetic psychology, rather than systematic and exhaustive treatments. Among the Germans even less has been done from the truly psychological point of approach. Giesebrecht[6] and Kurtz[7] have

[1] *The Psychology of Religious Experience.*

[2] *Old Testament Prophecy*, and articles on (1) "Prophecy and Prophets," (2) "Jeremiah" in *HDB.*

[3] *Expositor's Bible.*

[4] *The Psychology of Prophecy.*

[5] *The Inspiration of Prophecy.*

[6] *Berufsbegabung der Propheten.*

[7] *Psychologie der vorexilischen Prophetie.*

written monographs on prophetic psychology, and Duhm[1] and Cornill[2] in their commentaries have shown something of what might be accomplished by a thorough working of this field.[3]

But it remains for this interesting, not to say tantalizing, subject to receive the attention it deserves and it will not be strange if the next wave of interest in both the Old Testament and the New centers along this line, for in many ways it furnishes a more engrossing and productive angle of approach to the literature than does the purely historical. Historical criticism has by no means completed its task, but it may be that it has now come to such a stage of maturity that it is willing to take to itself an ally that will help it to achieve more positive results. For such a position psychological analysis and explanation is a contender.

This paper is an attempt to present a method of approach to the religion of the prophet. The method purports to be psychological and to distinguish between those materials which may be entered and considered in a scientific evaluation of so elevated a type of religious experience, and those which may not. At our basis lies the historical method and we must heed well all its findings; but on this basis we make a new evaluation—the psychological—which is even more exacting in its demands for accuracy and balance of judgment.

It goes without saying that such a program as is here presented is not merely theoretical. It could not be put forth at all without considerable concrete study in the field of both psychology and prophecy. In testing out our method two ways of dealing with the prophetic materials are open. One way is to draw illustrations for any particular thesis in the process of development of the program from the whole range of prophetic literature. Naturally this is the easier, for it furnishes a much wider choice of concrete illustrations, and by their use the method can be rounded out much more satisfactorily in its practical application. The other and harder method of application is to take the whole life of a single prophet, so far as the sources furnish us the materials, and work it out in a more human and intelligible picture. In such a study lies the particular value of this program of prophetic experience, if it turns out to have

[1] *Commentaries on the Prophets.* [2] *Commentary on Jeremiah.*

[3] Hölscher's *Profeten* (1914) appeared too late for use here.

a particular value. It is an ambitious program and is not content to give up the pursuit of so high a form of religion until scientific research has done its work and the laws of cause and effect in the religious realm have been applied. It is not necessarily an attempt to prove that all forms and degrees of religious genius can be analyzed and defined in terms of modern psychology, but rather a willingness to go as far as facts carry us and then to make proper and valid inferences on the basis of such facts. If there remain an unexplained residuum, we have the assured belief that psychology will not be discredited, just as we are led to believe that religion will not suffer if psychological science is able to give a reasonable explanation of some of the phenomena that formerly were considered too sacred to be scrutinized.

Two preliminary tasks arise for one who applies this or any similar program—tasks arising from the nature of the prophetic materials. The first pertains to the interpretation of the literary form in which the prophet gives expression to his experience. A casual perusal of the prophetic books will show that all the prophets were conscious of what they interpreted to be a divine compulsion; the most common form of the manifestation of this extra-human influence is visions and voices. The question raised here is not one as to the reality of the experience, but one as to whether the form in which it is found is literal or figurative. Manifestly, we cannot settle the question a priori, nor even by appeal to the facts in the case of one or two prophets. It is a question which must be raised afresh as we approach the record of each individual prophet. All that can be done here, then, is to indicate what would seem to be a scientific procedure in addressing ourselves to the problem.

The problem, then, is: Are vision and voice a convenient literary form inherited from the past or developed for the exigency by means of which to give vivid, outward expression to the inner experience, or are they a genuine and real part of the experience? Unless we recognize this problem, all sorts of complications may arise in attempting a reasonable exegesis. From this point of view, each seer presents his own problem. They cannot all be treated according to one criterion. Amos, Isaiah, and Ezekiel present each his own peculiarity of vision form, and in each case a faithful effort

must be made to distinguish between that part which is mere figure or framework, consciously so used, and that which for the prophet was an integral and real part of his experience. This will require the most subtle literary and psychological criteria, but the attempt is worth making if we are to get at the core of the matter.

The second preliminary consideration, viz., the question of the sources, may be passed with a word. We have fallen upon perilous times in matters of historical criticism, and in the mêlée none has suffered more than some of our most endeared Old Testament prophets. In the present status of criticism, it is impossible to be exact in the use of literary materials. The only safe plan to pursue is to take the minimum of authenticated sources as our basis of procedure, and even then we are not sure that some of these will not be discredited tomorrow. Yet there is some comfort in the fact that the psychological reconstruction suffers less in these uncertain days than the historical; for history has to do with exact facts and without them it cannot proceed far, while the psychological method gets its chief value in the study of the bold outlines of a life. This is not to say, however, that it is not closely conditioned by historical fact, at every step.

We undertake now a plan for the genetic study of the prophet's experience and distinguish four principal topics, as follows: (1) antecedents and inheritances; (2) environment; (3) temperament; (4) the prophetic experience.

I. THE PROPHET'S ANTECEDENTS AND INHERITANCES

In the light of biological and psychological science, it is becoming ever more certain that the roots of our lives, our beliefs and practices, are deeply imbedded in the past; that the average individual is what he is largely because of what he has lived through in racial history, however narrowly or widely those terms may be interpreted; and that even the most extraordinary person is not wholly free from this enslavement to the past. There are ever fewer and fewer geniuses, in the sense that they transcend and defy explanation in terms that can be accounted for. Therefore, it will not be strange if we find some of the prophet's peculiarities in these inheritances. He may have passively accepted them and been

unconsciously guided by them, or he may have analyzed their influence upon his times and reacted against them. A study of these antecedents will have to do with both the form and the content of the prophet's message. What, then, has the previous age contributed to the form of prophecy in its golden age? This will require a complete study of the earlier forms of prophecy in Israel, as well as of the form of prophetic messages among other and earlier peoples; in other words, a genetic study of the form of prophecy, for rudiments of form are likely to persist even after the content has completely changed. It is well to note that here we are dealing with a different question from the one raised in the preliminary study. There we asked: Was the form in which the prophet couched his message a true facsimile of that message as it came to him or was he consciously using literary form as the vehicle of his thought? Here we ask the still more ultimate question: What influence had the form of earlier prophecy on the form in which the prophet felt bound to receive his message in order that it might be authentic? Did his inheritance along this line dictate to him the psychological condition in which his mind must be placed, in order that he might be receptive to the divine message, or did he strike out rather boldly and independently, and largely disregard the form dictated by tradition; in short, was he able to distinguish between form and essence; e.g., did trance and ecstasy so persist in the time of Amos and Isaiah that they were sought by these men as genuine prophetic experiences, as forms that were considered a necessary and integral part of the message; or, on the other hand, has the prophet here supervened his inheritance, and developed a new conception of prophecy in which the essential element is not, in any degree, linked to form, but consists entirely in its ethical and religious content, regardless of the way in which it may have been intuited; or, in the third place, does he fall somewhere between these two extremes, showing considerable progress toward an ethical religion inwardly conditioned, but not being able entirely to free himself from inherited and conventional forms?

Then what have inherited ideas had to do with conditioning the prophet's mind for his work, either by hindering or by helping? Here we must take into survey the religious conceptions of the

pre-prophetic age and scrutinize them as carefully as possible. It is not difficult to see that there was great progress in the purification and clarification of religious ideas in the two centuries preceding the great prophets, and, although Amos comes upon us suddenly and seemingly without proper introduction, with his independent social and ethical ideas, yet we may find, on closer analysis, that in him and his successors many ideas that were already in process of crystallization have come out into the clear light, fostered by their vigor and insight, and have entered more or less fully into the currents of their common thoughts. This fact could no doubt be much more completely shown than is commonly thought, if our authentic sources for this period were not so few. It is reasonable to believe that there were currents of ethical thought preceding Amos, of which we have scarcely any direct hint. It may be possible to trace these out more clearly than has yet been done, even with the meager sources at our disposal. Such a study would scarcely have warrant were it not for the fact that we have a growing appreciation of the debt each generation owes to its predecessors. Such a study, if in any degree successful, will not detract one whit from the greatness of these great men. They will still retain a sufficient meed of praise; they stand out on the basis of what they were and what they did, but it will help us to understand them better and thus to appreciate them the more. An examination of these inherited views would include such topics as the pre-prophetic or (in the case of later prophets) the earlier prophetic views of God; the cultus; the ethical element in religion in this period; the prophet and his work, his relation to politics and government, his attitude toward the innovations of advancing civilization, etc.

II. THE PROPHET'S ENVIRONMENT

Here, at the outset, it is necessary to define terms, so as to make a clear distinction between the matter treated in the foregoing topic and that which is to be included here. In the above section, we attempt to deal with influences which persist from a former age. Here, we desire to classify those influences which are new, which take origin in the prophet's own time, owing to political and social

changes and exigencies. Here again it is not incumbent upon us to find the prophet entirely a child of his own times, else he would not be worthy of special study; but when we do study the conditions with which he was surrounded and find him in part influenced by them, in part withstanding them, we understand him the better for so doing. And this juxtaposition of his own views to those current among his people may be one of the secrets of the development of his character. If great men are the product of great times, then the inference is clear, if we would learn the secret of the men themselves. Was the prophet a nationalist, and, if so, was he one for the same reason that his fellow-Israelites were, or did his insight into conditions drive him to a new interpretation of the political significance of his nation? Was it the political influence or was it the social that bulked largest in the making of Amos and the content of his scathing sermons? What were the peculiar circumstances, within and without, that gave Hosea his hot, tender message of divine love? What do the messages of Isaiah and Jeremiah owe to the political and religious background of their day? Do their differing environments throw any light upon the fact that Micah prophesied with no uncertain tone the fall of Jerusalem, while Isaiah repeatedly held to the inviolability of the Holy City, even though he was convinced that the surrounding country districts would be devastated? In a word, to what extent do the confines of time and place and circumstance limit the horizon of the seer and prescribe the materials which shall furnish content and coloring for his message? In a study of this character, not only do we learn what contribution an age makes to a man's thinking and doing, but, what is more important, we get here, in the clash between ideals and actual conditions which must be faced, the breeding-ground of persistence, vigor, character, and message, by means of which the man makes his contribution to his age and all subsequent ages. The environment of home, church, school, society, and country are not a negligible factor in any life, however extraordinary or peculiar.

III. THE PROPHET'S TEMPERAMENT

Temperament is rather an elusive term when its analysis is attempted, but unless we can deal with it in more or less satisfactory

fashion, some secret of prophetic greatness may escape us; understanding it, we may see clearly some of the factors that have hitherto been indistinct. First of all there is a temperament of youth and of rising manhood, becoming conscious of itself, as distinguished from that of the mature man who has settled down to face the hard facts of life. Did the prophets receive their calls in young manhood just as they were emerging from the enchanted land of adolescence? If so, much light is thrown upon their experience by modern studies in the later adolescent period. Does it make any difference whether Isaiah was twenty or forty years of age when he saw the Holy One, high and lifted up, his train filling the temple? Can age have anything to do with the peculiar sternness and severity of Amos' messages?

While temperament is admitted to be largely hereditary—possibly because we know so little about it—yet it may be much more a product of training, and especially of very early impressions, than we are wont to believe. While evidence on this point is almost entirely lacking in the case of the prophets, yet we must not neglect any of it that lies at hand, if it will help to explain peculiarities of individuals. City-breeding gives a certain bent to one's conceptions; pastoral life, another, and agricultural pursuits, yet another. Acquaintance with the best science of an age gives a type of thinking very different from that found among those who think naïvely.

But more important than these is that peculiar, inborn, mental composition which distinguishes individuals and which seems so deep rooted as to defy all attempts to classify it under a norm or type. Though all external stimuli may seem to be similar if not identical, mental reactions are found to be very different from each other in different individuals. You cannot run the thinking of mentally active people into the same mold, but, under the most favorable conditions, it is by no means a rarity to get the most diverse types of mental process and product. What is the explanation? One man is a rationalist; another is highly emotional. Either may become a mystic and have inexplicable experiences, but they arrive at them by very different routes. One man is active and aggressive in temperament; another is passive and retiring. Infilled with a divine passion, one of these men experiences the over-

powering influence of a great Spirit or Personality, in whose hands he is passive and helpless; the other is conscious of his own heightened power of activity, under the inspiration of the same Spirit. They may be equally vigorous and fiery in carrying out the mission intrusted to them. Will these and other observations by modern psychology, when applied to the prophet, help us the better to understand the man and his message?

IV. THE PROPHET'S EXPERIENCE

We come now to the crux of the whole matter, an attempt to explain, or at least to interpret, that peculiar experience which makes a prophet a prophet, which distinguishes him from any other class of religionist and lifts him to a table-land of insight and outlook which intensifies his religious energy many fold and charges his whole life and being with a new purpose and opens up larger capacities. If we cannot, to some extent, enter into this holy of holies, all our preliminary drawings-nigh will be largely of no avail, for the only excuse one may give for undertaking this overweening task of psychological analysis is that he may get near to the heart of the experience of men who had a peculiar consciousness of the immediate presence of God in their lives, and a special sensitiveness to his revelation, both of himself and of his message to them. We are not here concerned with mere description; we must go deeper; an effort must be made to interpret the experience and its meaning for our time, as well as for the prophet and his day. The most rigid and critical tests of modern research in the psychological field must be applied. If the prophet was self-deceived and a satisfactory explanation in subjective terms can be made of his experience, this does not in the least detract from what he was and what he accomplished, but it makes it practically impossible for his experience and his type of character to be duplicated in our more scientific age, at least among those who understand the viewpoint of psychology. But if we must conclude that there is more than the subjective, that his experience is the result of a divine personal energy working upon, and co-operating with, an intense human spirit, we get a religious state devoutly to be wished and sought by men of every time.

Professor Ames, in his chapter on "Psychology and Religious Genius," says:

[It has often been assumed that genius, including religious genius] designated an assumed irreducible and unanalyzable factor in human nature, a kind of given endowment which the science of psychology cannot legitimately adopt. It is a part of the scientific attitude to insist upon the application of analysis and interpretation to all factors and functions of the mental life. It is too much to expect that psychological explanations will not be undertaken simply because the phenomena involved are complex or obscure, or because some people insist that they are wholly inscrutable. The results of the investigation may be negative or meager or only partially sustained, but no phenomena of human experience can lay claim to immunity from at least the attempt to understand them. Therefore any statement of genius which assumes it to involve factors radically different from those of ordinary experience is vitiated at the outset by that assumption.

Professor Leuba goes even farther and gives the distinct impression that psychology has the legitimate right to pre-empt to itself the entire field of religion and to declare that there is no phenomenon in this field that psychology cannot grapple with and explain.

Psychology, on its side, claims the right to submit every content of consciousness to scientific study, whether it be dubbed "inner," "spiritual," or otherwise; moreover, it has begun to make good that claim.[1] . . . . Religious experience ("inner experience") belongs entirely to psychology—"entirely" being used in the same sense as when it is claimed that the non-religious portions of conscious life belong entirely to science.[2] . . . . I trust that it has become clear that the hope to lift a theology based on inner experience out of the sphere of science is preposterous; since whatever appears in consciousness is material for psychology. Religious knowledge may be said to be immediate and independent of science only in the sense in which this can be stated of any experience. Any bit of conscious life is in itself, as a fact of consciousness, unassailable. But a theology that should remain within a domain inaccessible to science would be limited to a mere description of man's religious consciousness and would be deprived of the right to any opinion on the objective reality of its objects and on the universal validity of its propositions. . . . . If superhuman factors are at work within human experience, there are no ways of discovering them except the ways of science.[3]

On the other hand, Professor Pratt is much less sanguine as to the ability of psychology to solve all problems in the province of religion:

[1] Leuba, *A Psychological Study of Religion*, p. 211.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 212.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 242.

Equally misleading does it seem to me to suppose, as some leading "functional" psychologists seem to do, that the psychology of religion can ever so develop as to be in any sense a substitute for philosophy or theology. In the opinion of this school, ethics, aesthetics, logic, epistemology, and metaphysics are ultimately nothing but functional psychology.[1] . . . . The psychology of religion must . . . . content itself with a description of human experience, while recognizing that there may well be spheres of reality to which these experiences refer and with which they are possibly connected, yet which cannot be investigated by science.[2]

These quotations from leading scholars in this field show that the psychology of religion is yet in process of finding itself and that there is no consensus of opinion even among these experts themselves as to its proper province. The theory of Professor Leuba which allows no objective validity to the content of "value judgments" is not likely to be very generally accepted and will need further elucidation and buttressing. On the other hand, Professor Pratt seems rather too modest in his claims for the new science. However, for his side of the case it may reasonably be said that the psychology of religion is scarcely likely to be so successful in revealing and explaining the content and meaning of our religious selves that men will cease to philosophize and theologize; i.e., to transcend the boundaries of pure scientific observation and induction and to move out into the realm of speculation and "faith." The criterion set forth in Professor Ames's statement of the case seems sound, and there is little danger that a thoroughgoing psychology will go too far. If we persist in creating for ourselves, or if there is already created for us, an extra-scientific world, a "faith" realm, then it is clear that psychology can have no dealings with it, either to prove or to disprove its existence. Philosophical assumptions are not material for psychological analysis; while psychology may satisfy itself in the explanation of religious genius, without the assumption of an extra-human, divine element, and while in some cases its analysis may be true to the facts, yet it can never prove that it has the truth in all cases, nor yet can it even prove in what specific cases it has the whole truth in the matter. So long as we admit a realm, the objective reality of which is not subject to psychological scrutiny, religion

[1] Pratt, article "Psychology of Religion," in *Journal of Religious Psychology*, V, 391.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 393.

will present phenomena which do not lie within the realm of scientific proof, and whether we assume divine afflatus, or whether we rule it out, *either* assumption is a postulate of the mind and not a proved fact. Furthermore, the term "ordinary experience," used by Professor Ames in the last sentence of his quotation, does not claim that some degree of a personal knowledge of God is not a part of normal religious experience; thus we may not assume at the outset that the genius is a man of peculiar endowments, different in kind rather than in degree from those of his fellows. But if, in the course of our investigations and analyses of any specific character, we find elements which cannot be separated out and classified according to the accepted norms, if there is found the unanalyzable residuum, it is the part of the scientific attitude to recognize it, even if we must hold judgment temporarily in suspense, or plead the cause of a yet undeveloped science.

The theory that greatness is constituted not so much of entirely new and strange elements as of a proper and symmetrical blending of the common qualities and graces unmistakably has some startling illustrations in its favor. If it be true, then the Hebrew prophet may not be such a psychological enigma as a more superficial view would indicate.

As has already been pointed out, it is safe to assume that in many ways the prophet was a child of his times. Mentally, his stock of ideas is very largely that in common circulation. The different currents of ideas may combine in varying proportions. In his case, the ideas of the prophetic party, which is essentially, though not nominally, the religious party, have the predominance, while the formalistic side of religion represented by the cultus does not appeal to him. Furthermore, the prophet is not an apathetic thinker; his mental life is enkindled and intense. He has a peculiar ability to rearrange ideas, so that new truths present themselves clearly. The prophet is not a traditionalist; he does not live in the past; on the other hand, he is willing to take from the past beliefs which are conserving elements in the present religious and social crisis. Again, he was no mere dreamer of dreams who looked sanguinely for the "far-off divine event" which would usher in a glorious age. He lived in and for his own day; and he was the greatest man of his

day, simply because his mental vision took in the whole range of facts, however disquieting some of them might be. He was not a false optimist nor was he a false pessimist, but he saw the truth as it was, not simply as a closed revelation, but also as based on facts interpreted in harmony with universal law.

This mental alertness made the prophet a student of his times. The question whether or not he was an educated man in any technical or academic sense is not of so great importance. He was awake and new truth was constantly coming to him; his education was never declared "finished." Thus it was easy for new revelations to be received by him; he could neither resist nor reject them. Mental alertness and breadth, ethical depth, and religious exaltation which in its purest form expresses itself in a consciousness of fellowship with God form together an equilateral triangle, or better, a closed circle of experience. They are all of a piece; they produce the symmetrical person. It may be quite impossible to say in which of these three compartments of the individual's mental life the enkindling begins, or what may have been the specific cause which served to fan the smoldering spirit into flame, but if these three elements are combined in proper proportions, the one reacts upon the others until in turn all three are raised to a white heat, and then "who can but prophesy"?

It may be well to note that for the prophet there seemed to be no well-defined differentiation of national, social, and religious consciousness from each other, and we may even go farther and say that, at times at least, he was scarcely able to detect a personal consciousness as distinct from these three. The age of clear individualism was yet in the future and the prophet was not, consciously at least, a psychologist. So far as he analyzed his mental states at all, he was interested largely in their religious meaning. But, if the foregoing analysis contains any truth, it throws light upon the attitude of the prophet; it explains why he was so zealous in matters of politics and government; it opens up a reason for his proclivities toward social reform; it helps to explain his ardent love for his people, even in their sin and wickedness. They were an undifferentiated part of himself and of his God. Furthermore, this analysis may go far in explaining his religious

nature, for, if he was so intimately associated with his people—the nation—on one hand, and his God on the other, so that his own consciousness was both a social- and a God-consciousness, he could have been but a mouthpiece of God to the nation, feeling himself a passive agent in God's hand, even when he had been most active, mentally and morally, in preparing himself for his mission. As his social message grew upon him, it assumed proportions which made it appeal to him as superhuman and hence as divinely originated. This idea as a principle of interpretation would, of course, require to be worked out in detail in accordance with ascertainable facts, in the case of each separate prophet.

One set of interpreters of the psychology of the prophet makes the original element in his experience to be a "premonition"[1] that the nation is to be destroyed. His ideas follow this order: first, he has a premonition of this event; then he looks about for that which is to be the cause of destruction, and finds it in the sin of the nation; then, more gradually, he is led to predict the agent of the destruction.

But whence the premonition? It must be manufactured out of thin air. What data in the mind of the prophet serve to give this premonition ballast and content? Would it not be much more natural, as well as scientific, to suppose that the prophet received his impetus either from a study of the social and political conditions, or from so real and compelling a fact as a new and higher conception of the nature of God, based on study and observation—i.e., real mental activity—and that then, as a natural consequence of his observations, he concluded that the downfall of the nation, if the nation persisted in its present way, was but a matter of time?

Finally an attempt must be made to interpret not only the larger and more general experience of the prophet, but also that more specific experience which may be called religious, through which he became conscious of his call from God and his mission to the people. After a careful study of the narrative in order to discover and set aside any literary device that may have been used to convey the fact of his experience to his hearers or readers, we have next to determine if possible whether he is relating a single outstanding experience which was epoch-making in his career, or

[1] Kaplan, *The Psychology of Prophecy*.

whether these experiences came to him periodically, due to excessive mental strain and possibly some temperamental abnormality, or whether his religious messages came to him intuitively, in the more or less even tenor of his way and without special excitation or ecstasy. Psychologically all these are possible modes or grades of inspiration. To critical thinking, they are of varying value; so are they also to naïve thinking, but in inverse ratio. We are prone to think that in just the proportion in which ecstatic and trance states were absent or suppressed was the prophet's experience valid and his utterance valuable; hence we have a tendency in the case of the greater prophets to reduce this element to the minimum; but this somewhat dogmatic view may err in the wrong direction. It is too easy to assume that certain types of experience are authentic and therefore that opposite types must be weak, if not even vicious. By their fruits must they be known. If one man gets his vision of truth mystically, it is not for the scientifically minded to declare his experience invalid, in the nature of things, and vice versa. But it would not be surprising if we found that, as the ethical element in the prophet's message comes to the fore, the more or less irrational and subnormal forms of inspiration recede, for rational and ethical truth are discerned by the more sober and logical mental processes.

Thus it is not difficult to see that in the pre-prophetic period, the ecstatic and trance states were considered quite a requisite preparation for, and hence a necessary and essential part of, the prophet's experience. In the period of the greater prophets, however, this ecstatic possession, as a state, was at the minimum, and a conscious intuition of truth, with little or no excessive excitation, took its place. Of this even Davidson is quite certain, for he uses as the closest analogy to the prophetic experience "the condition of the religious mind in earnest devotion, or rapt spiritual communion with God."[1] If we could reduce the prophetic experiences thus to one type, it would greatly simplify our problem, but when one reads the prophets it is quite reasonable to believe that these abnormal states of ecstasy, trance, vision, and audition did, to some extent, persist and insinuate themselves into prophetic times. Whether they did or not, and, if so, to what extent they did is the real

[1] Davidson, *HDB*, IV, 115, article on "Prophecy and Prophets."

problem, for modern psychology undertakes to explain all these states as self-induced and not necessarily due to a supernatural cause. In fact, there is a growing certainty that the supernatural does not work in such capricious ways; but again, we must remember that the prophet is not a modern, in spite of all his points of superiority, and that even we moderns may not have the whole truth as yet. The point is that we must not discredit the prophet, if it can be reasonably shown that he did perceive truth while in these so-called abnormal states.

But for those who take a religious view of the world, there is no question as to the essence, the kernel of the prophet's experience and message. We believe that, not only at the heart of things, but in the van as well, "our God is marching on"; he makes progressive revelation of himself and of eternal truth, but he speaks clearly only to the sincere and inquiring mind. The prophet was passionate to know truth and righteousness. He lived in a time when new truth and new inspiration for right living were sorely needed. He went to what he believed to be the fountain-head of wisdom and goodness and he received them. That is probably as much as we can say. A quotation from Davidson applies just here:

> It is vain to speculate how the Divine mind coalesces with the human, or to ask at what point the Divine begins to operate. Some have argued that the operation was dynamical; i.e., an intensification of the faculties of the mind, enabling it thus to reach higher truth. Others regard the Divine operation as of the nature of suggestion of truth to the mind. What is to be held, at all events, is that revelation was not the communication of general or abstract ideas to the intellect of the prophet. His whole religious mind was engaged. He entered into the fellowship of God, his mind occupied with all his own religious interests and all those of the people of God; and his mind thus operating, he reached the practical truth relevant to all occasions.[1]

[1] Davidson, *HDB*, IV, 116, article on "Prophecy and Prophets."

THE PROPHET JEREMIAH

In taking up some phases of the life of Jeremiah in order to make a specific and concrete illustration of the method set forth in the preceding pages, we cannot hope to bring out much, if anything, that is startlingly new, for most of the points here brought into systematic and related form have been noted here and there by the various commentators whom we have mentioned. But not one of them has set out with the deliberate purpose of evaluating and arranging all the material in accordance with the accepted tenets of modern psychology. Needless to say, that is our specific attempt here.

In the first place, we are not interested in doing again the work of critics in the historical field. Though they differ widely in results, their criteria are very much alike. It is evident that some experts in the field of historical criticism lack psychological appreciation, so it is natural that here we should follow with more zeal those who seem to manifest the greater measure of this most necessary quality.

Secondly, one who has ever attempted to find a unity in the Book of Jeremiah by even a cursory reading knows something of the difficulty with which we proceed to our material. Manifestly, it would be difficult to attempt a running historical sketch of the prophet's life as a whole, for the material is so unevenly distributed, and furthermore any such exposition would far transcend our space limits. We must be content then to suggest what may be done on a much larger scale, by selecting the early life and the call experience of Jeremiah and dealing with a few of the problems presented by this phase of a great life. Naturally, those topics are chosen which give the best opportunity for testing our criteria of prophetic religious experience.

Needless to say, numerous hindrances due to the scantiness and uncertainty of our sources constantly obstruct our procedure, and in many ways the results are disappointing because of their negative character.

Attitude toward the sources.—Though concerned here directly with only one chapter of the Book of Jeremiah we must draw indirect evidence from the entire book; hence an attitude must be taken toward the sources as a whole. Our problem is twofold:

I. What materials in the book must be ruled out of use as unauthentic; i.e., as from hands later than those of Jeremiah and his amanuensis, Baruch? This involves still another question, viz., what were the sources for this later material and were they authentic? This question, in most cases at least, will not receive an answer, but it should be kept in mind. It is evident that at least some passages might be used in a psychological appreciation, which would not pass muster with historical criticism, but it seems best to admit only those materials which are to be substantiated only on the most rigid historical grounds. However, where what seems to be an incorrect psychological analysis has been applied in arriving at critical results, it is our privilege, in the interest of true science, to make the proper analysis, even though it reverse or modify the results of the historical process, for, in the final analysis, the successful historical expert must have a good understanding of psychology. This is especially true in a study of the extraordinary character of the prophet, Jeremiah. In such a many-sided nature, mere mechanical tests as to the validity of materials are not sufficient. There must be a wide understanding of the peculiar workings of the human mind and of the seemingly inconsistent combination of traits and temperaments that are sometimes to be found in a single individual. It goes without saying that there must be sympathy for the personality with which one is dealing; not blind and sentimental sympathy, but an intelligent appreciation of the peculiarities of the man, as well as an ability to understand the hard and trying, even exasperating, situations in which he is placed.

It is easy to relegate to the realm of the impossible, especially in the study of great personalities, types of behavior which become quite clear when all the circumstances are considered.

II. In the light of the fact that Jeremiah did not reduce his prophecies to written form until the twenty-third year of his public ministry, and also that much of the biographical material was not

added until some years later, we have the interesting problem of sifting and evaluating material.

First of all, what was Baruch's relation to Jeremiah? This is not a problem so long as we are considering those parts of the prophecy which Jeremiah is said to have dictated to Baruch, for in this case the latter is simply an amanuensis. But the problem does arise in the biographical portions which were compiled by Baruch. It is generally held by critics that genuine Baruch material is virtually as authentic as Jeremian material. Historically, this may be quite true, and psychologically it may be far from true. It is generally assumed that a man's biographer appreciates and represents him truly, because of his intimate fellowship with him, but it does not follow that all biographers understand the subjects of their labors of love, and some may greatly misunderstand. But here it is reasonable to assume that Baruch, who spent so many years at the prophet's side, certainly because he loved and appreciated him, was a worthy biographer, and it is not beyond belief that, just because he was able to stand outside the prophet's consciousness and view it, undisturbed by the great floods of feeling that sometimes beset the temperamental Jeremiah, he understood the prophet better than Jeremiah understood himself. So we should at least be profoundly thankful to Baruch for his part in preserving for us the record of some of the events of the prophet's stormy life, and one need not hesitate to use these materials in arriving at a knowledge of Jeremiah as he was.

But a more interesting and exacting problem is raised by the first part of our question. Jeremiah dictated the larger part of his oracles, some of which were spoken in the first five years of his public life, twenty-three years after he began his work as a prophet. No one, even though he be an adept in the use of critical processes, is able to write down his experiences a score of years after they occur and expect them to be true to fact. Their recorded form is most likely to be not simply a statement of the original experiences, but, as well, of the reaction the individual himself has made toward those experiences, tempered by the events and changing attitudes of all the intervening years. Even today, with all our cultivation of the art of introspection, it is the unusual person who is able

to perform the most difficult task of abstracting from the total mass of experience, and evaluating at their true worth, events and experiences that have occurred years previously. At first this state of affairs in Jeremiah's case seems to land us in utter chaos, so far as arriving at a true evaluation of his various experiences, earlier and later, is concerned. Let us note an example. Throughout his entire public life, until it actually came in 597, Jeremiah looked for a destructive enemy from the north. His very earliest oracles are full of this threat and are quite universally held to have had in prospect the incursions of the Scythians, though Jeremiah, as we now have it, nowhere speaks of them by name. The Scythians failed to overrun the land, but Jeremiah continued to look for this terrible enemy from this same direction. It is only immediately preceding the Babylonian triumph of 597 that we find the name of this enemy clearly mentioned. Now there are several possibilities here, but they are all vitiated by the fact that the prophet wrote down his impressions many years after some of them came to him, and after there had been a great change in the political outlook. It is probable that if Jeremiah had written down his earlier oracles at the time they were uttered we should find unmistakable references to, if not the specific mention of, the Scythians, but writing so long after these stirring years, in times just as stirring, though very different, he purposely omits specific reference to the Scythian threat, which never materialized, so far as Judah was concerned, and so retouches these earlier oracles that they become a general and cumulative reference to the later and greater threat which was just about to materialize when he prepared his roll. Had we specific references to this enemy from the north in these earlier oracles the fact would be of great value in the dating of our sources.

On the other hand, in dealing with the sources as a whole, it is possible to overwork this side of the case. The constant repetitions in the first ten chapters of the book lead one to question seriously whether the prophet dictated purely from memory, and in any case we are not required to assume such a thing. In the light of these repetitions, it is a more probable assumption that the prophet had at hand very brief and scrappy notes of his early sermons, mere

catch-line notes, we may call them. There is no question that in his actual ministry the prophet was constantly repeating his message; he had but one message and it was plainly and directly spoken. He did not aim at revealing breadth of culture or variety of literary form in his sermons. But this fact would not require him, twenty years later, to reproduce the content of each of these deliverances, regardless of how closely they resembled each other in form and thought. Nor need we require of the prophet's memory the gigantic task of reproducing at this time so many separate oracles as we seem to have here. If Jeremiah had at his disposal in 604 these jottings or brief notes and used them in his dictation, giving a short paragraph to each one, there is here some explanation of the fragmentariness of these chapters as well as of the repetitions, and at the same time we may not be so much at sea regarding the prophet's earlier conceptions and teachings, though, be it remembered, the assumption of notes for dictation does not set aside the probability that the prophet felt free to correct and supplement his fragmentary catch-lines. And this he would do, quite necessarily, in the light of his whole experience, to date.

I. JEREMIAH'S EARLY LIFE

There is a certain universality in the reign of psychological laws. Thus we may enter upon our task with the assured belief that the most momentous influences that played upon the life and aroused the activities of the great prophet made their impress upon him in the early and formative period of his existence. These influences, even if indistinctly discerned, help to explain the man as he was in later life. Even if in the case of Jeremiah we fail to some extent to make out a good case, owing to the scarcity of material covering this period of his life, we know that in not a few cases circumstances similar to those which must have surrounded him have been powerful stimuli in the molding of other lives not unlike this one. Thus the burden of proof lies upon those who would reject or minimize the importance of these early experiences.

As a matter of fact, it is much easier to try to explain the success or failure of a life by its great outstanding events, its crises, than it is to dig down and examine carefully the countless rootlets, which

have each drawn up its tiny portion of sustenance into the great life. At any rate these childhood influences are very important in that they serve as predetermining elements, silently though powerfully at work in the reaction he makes toward the greater event when it suddenly makes its impact upon him and calls for a speedy defining of his position, even as he stands in its very presence. In other words, the decisions we make in the face of a great demand are tempered and in a large degree determined by those more steady and less pretentious influences that have filtrated into our lives through the years. To understand any man, then, from any point of view, his home and childhood life must be taken into account.

Jeremiah was born and lived to maturity in the hamlet Anathoth, in the hills two and one-half miles northeast of Jerusalem, with barren hills to the east and northeast and the salt sea to the southeast, "striking but depressing elements of landscape," says Cheyne. "The vision of the dreary wilderness to the east and the scorching of its dry winds . . . . have impressed themselves on his prophecies."[1] Being reared in the vicinity of Jerusalem, it is to be supposed that he knew something of city life as represented there.

But more important for our purpose are the family influences. The book of Jeremiah makes the prophet the son of Hilkiah of the priests that were in Anathoth, in the land of Benjamin. Authorities are quite agreed in connecting this Hilkiah with the priestly family of Abiathar who was banished to Anathoth and deprived of priestly rights[2] for his part in the coup of Adonijah.

But since the tradition had come down to Jeremiah's day that they were a family of priests, and since it is tolerably certain that they officiated as such at Anathoth, the priestly rights must have been restored, or at any rate resumed, at some time after Solomon's day. Thus it is probable that the family still enjoyed, though in an inferior and out-of-the-way place and with waning influence, the dignity of priestly position. Now this family of Abiathar had in the annals of their history two facts upon which

[1] Henderson, article "Anathoth," in *HDB*.

[2] I Kings 2:27.

they loved to dwell. They claimed descent from Moses through Eliezer and Phinehas, and Abiathar had been the close friend and counselor of King David, throughout most of his public life. Then there was a story of persecution, for Ahimelech, the father of Abiathar, was high priest at Nob when Saul ordered the slaughter of the priests for their part in aiding David. Later Abiathar, who was the only one to escape, suffered the above-named persecution under Solomon. It is rather surprising that so celebrated a priestly family, after falling out of history for some three hundred years, should at this late date produce so notable a scion. He seems to be the product of its long-pent-up piety and energy, the glorious flower of its expiry.

Jeremiah seems also to have inherited a tribal loyalty, as evidenced in his acquaintance with the legend of Rachel weeping for her children and refusing comfort. Such stories as this, added to those of family persecutions, served, in his tender years, to stir up and cultivate the sympathy and intensity of feeling, which the great prophet manifested to such a degree in later years.

It is questionable whether Jeremiah was ever, until his very last years, completely detached from Anathoth and the home restraints. Even in the busiest period of his career he made visits, social or commercial, to his native village. It is but natural that on his last recorded visit, he goes not simply to buy a field, but to redeem the old estate, to make out inheritance papers. Jeremiah remained unmarried, hence he, as a normal man, continued, even in the face of misunderstandings and persecutions, to prize the old home relationships, perhaps with growing intensity as the years of deep disappointment and failure came.

In a family where the family glory centered about such personages as Rachel, Moses, and David, we can easily believe that the highest political and religious ideals which the nation had had through the centuries were kept vividly in the foreground.

A noble family, whose fortunes are waning and whose future is hopeless, feeds its yearning and bolsters its pride by the recounting of its past glories. It is not at all improbable that in this family there was a revival of hope in the stirring days of Isaiah about a century earlier. In the fact that Judah was left when Israel was

taken and that Jerusalem was well-nigh miraculously spared, there may have been a gleam of hope, and the prophetic ideals aroused at this time may help to explain Jeremiah's advent.

In the earlier experiences of his life, also, one is inclined to find the explanation of the fact that Jeremiah felt himself called to be a prophet, even from before his birth. This statement of his made in connection with the call is more than a strong figure of speech. It is by no means an unheard-of thing for pious mothers, hoping and praying for sons, to dedicate their unborn children to the service of God. This was true in a marked degree of Jewish mothers, especially in the case of the firstborn. We can well believe Jeremiah's mother to have been such a woman. This son, with whom Jahwe was honoring her, was to be more than a mediocre priest officiating at a small and unimportant sanctuary. Stirred by the records of the great prophets of a century earlier, she felt that he would be a worthy scion of his great forbears. Some great Hosean or Isaian task was to be his.

Naturally, as soon as the son became old enough to understand it, his mother told him of her hope for him, recounted the deeds of the past heroes of the family, detailing as well the pathetic story of the persecutions, and, in short, surrounded him with all those influences which would foster and fix in his purposive life a desire for that vocation which she had cherished for him and to which she had dedicated him. In the quiet of the hamlet home, he drank in the inspiration of these heroes of days long gone by. Upon them and their deeds his imagination fed, so that, while dulness reigned on the outside, the Jewish youth lived on the inside with most inspiring companions.

Contemplative power developed, and to his inner experience his mother's God began to be a very real person.

But we must look nearer at hand in the events then transpiring to find some of the influences that contributed to the making of Jeremiah. We must take into consideration the bloody and polluted years of Manasseh's reign. The wonder is, not that we find a Jeremiah arising near the end of the period, but that this half-century of insult to decent religion did not produce more than one prophet of a high order, for the church, in the days of her persecu-

tion, must produce the men who are able to discern and denounce the injustice under which she lies prostrate and helpless.

The list of Manasseh's abominations, given in II Kings, chap. 21, it seems would have challenged open resentment and opposition, but when we read further that "Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, until he had filled Jerusalem from one end to the other," it is clear why there was no open opposition to his most tyrannical censorship. H. P. Smith calls attention to the fact that this was, however, probably a period of secret literary effort. The Deuteronomic writer probably produced his new edition of the Mosaic legislation some time near the end of this reign. The prophecies of Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah were being studied. The J and E narratives may have been brought together into one document during this period.

When people are reading they are thinking as well. Even if Manasseh's religious ideas and practices were in part a reaction in favor of the old popular religion, there was enough in them that was new and offensively foreign to arouse the suspicion and resentment of every loyal Hebrew. Jeremiah's family must have been among those who felt the insult of such measures as the king instituted, especially if he had polluted their shrine. To them the reckless Manasseh must have been the incarnation of cruelty and irreligion, however religious he may have seemed to himself. For them it was a day of waiting, for it would be foolhardy openly to invite inquisition. Jeremiah may have been barely old enough to appreciate the condition of affairs before Manassah passed off the stage. Later, as a boy of eight or ten years, he may have heard descriptions of the desecrations of religion wrought by the king who was considered so great a disgrace to his good father. These stories continued to be told after Manasseh had been "gathered to his fathers."

To sum up, Jeremiah was born in a time of the prostitution of religion at the court and of persecution of the true religionists, and in a family which, though of a pure and spiritual religion, had with all others been suppressed by the reckless attitude of the wicked king; a condition once again fostering the contemplative spirit in a youth of sensitive nature and lofty religious teaching.

A most inviting yet extremely elusive problem presents itself when we undertake to evaluate the influence of the earlier prophets on Jeremiah. The difficulty is heightened by the fact that we do not know the order of Jeremiah's writings with sufficient certainty, nor do we know whether any of his sermons were in written or in "sketch" form before Baruch wrote them down in 604 at the prophet's dictation. Here again we can do no better than assign the material in chaps. 2–6, to the earlier years of Jeremiah's ministry, in accordance with the best criticism. It is impossible at this time to make a close comparison of the thought and literary form of Jeremiah with those of the earlier prophets, but a few observations may be in place.

We have already seen that the reign of Manasseh was one of persecution and censorship of the religion which Hezekiah his father had promoted, but that at the same time it was probably a time of considerable quiet literary activity. The writings of the eighth-century prophets were doubtless recopied and quite widely read by those who were sympathetic with their point of view. Jeremiah was one of these, and may well have read and assimilated these writings. While some startling external event, such as the Scythian invasion, may have served as the immediate occasion of his call, yet, when we read his call-experience we are struck with its great similarity to that of the great prophets preceding him, though it has also its distinct points of variance. Especially does it agree in essence with the call of Isaiah, though depicted in much less magnificent imagery. It seems but natural that the prophet would, in his sincerer moments in boyhood and in youth, seek just such experiences as the great men whom he admired had had before him. Such a view would in no sense detract from the independence or genuineness of his own experience, nor on the other hand would it by any means explain all we find in Jeremiah's religious experience. But it may help to explain why he was able to go deeper and more vitally to the heart of things in developing a truer inner fellowship with God. He was himself a true seeker after such an experience, and he had, to assist him in his quest, the record of the experiences of those who had been pioneers in the field of religious insight.

But do his writings or oral deliverances show dependence on these prophets? No one can well deny that we find on almost every page of the Book of Jeremiah, as we now have it, reminders of the Deuteronomic style. It is not difficult to detect its peculiar phraseology and its hortatory style. This is not altogether lacking in this earlier part of the book, but is not so marked as in other parts. This Deuteronomic influence could scarcely have come in until after the eighteenth year of Josiah, but would have had ample time to make its impress before the first roll was written.

Now when we examine chaps. 3–4, we are at once struck with its similarity to Hosea in both form and material. The unfaithful wife is depicted here almost as vividly and as pathetically as in Hosea. The word "backsliding," used only by Hosea up to this time, occurs in Jeremiah thirteen times, seven of which are in chap. 3 and one in chap. 2. The whole conception of chap. 3 is that of Hosea, and much of his tender, forgiving spirit finds place here. This cannot be said of any other part of the book in anything like the same degree. This similarity to Hosea is the more striking when we recall that Jeremiah was unmarried and could not have appreciated in the fullest sense the marital experiences of Hosea. Moreover, Jeremiah was still a very young man at this time. May not these facts indicate that in his earliest ministry, perhaps his very first series of sermons, the prophet borrows largely from the older prophet so dear to his own heart? This probability is heightened in the light of his unfitness by experience to present such a message. It is not unnatural that a timid, shrinking youth, without objective experience to serve as a content for his message, should, when he felt himself pushed out by the spirit, seize upon the message of one who had often been his inspiration. After this first struggle, when he has come into vital touch with the life of the people to whom he is to minister, a greater independence asserts itself in both the form and content of his preaching.

Confessedly, it is much more difficult to find traces of an influence of Amos or Isaiah in these earlier oracles. One may easily find thought that is akin to one or the other, or both, of these great prophets, but this does not by any means prove dependence.

In chap. 2, God's people are called into a law court to give testimony against him, and they are to return to him only by repentance and cleansing (see Isa., chap. 1). In the same chapter foreign alliances of all sorts are discouraged by the prophet (see also Isa.). Some of Amos' vivid pictures of destruction, especially by the lion, are to be found here. The remnant idea, granting that it is genuine in any of these prophets, is common to all. Similarly, extreme desolation of land and people is common to the three.

Judged by any standard, it would seem quite impossible to exaggerate the effect of the Scythian period upon the life and the future ministry of the young Jeremiah. A large part of chaps. 4–6, as well as considerable passages in chaps. 7–10, dealing with destruction to come from the north, are commonly held to have been inspired by this long-drawn-out invasion, which carried such frightful consequences to the great nations of Asia.

When we come to a specific treatment of the Scythians in their strange behavior in Asia, facts fail, but imagination is fertile and eloquent and easily supplies the missing data. The Greek tradition based on Herodotus tells us that the Scythians invaded Asia for a period of twenty-eight years, before mysteriously withdrawing, not to return again. The same tradition tells us that Psammetichus I of Egypt who came to the throne of Egypt in 640 B.C. besieged Ashdod twenty-eight years, and was forced to desist by the Scythians. Furthermore, Cambyses of Media who began his reign in 625 was forced in 620, by these same Scythians, to give up the siege of Nineveh. The best historians of this period are therefore inclined to place the first appearance of the Scythians in Asia at about 627 B.C., just in time to give the incentive which brought out the prophets, Jeremiah and Zephaniah, and their withdrawal from Asia somewhere between 599 and 590. However, it is a practical certainty that by about 610 these raiders had been satisfied by Egypt's tribute and had withdrawn beyond the Euphrates, for in 608 Necho came all the way to Carchemish with no resistance at all except on the part of Josiah of Judah. By this time, then, the Scythians must have retreated into Asia Minor, for only two or three years later Nebuchadrezzar of Babylonia was free to dispute Egypt's progress in western Asia. No great dependence can be

placed upon Herodotus' figure of twenty-eight years, but it would not be at all strange if rumors of these bloodthirsty hordes reached as far as Palestine and Syria, at least several years before they broke upon the Medes in 620.

From his very earliest years, Jeremiah may have heard the current stories of this mysterious north-region and of the disasters which were to come from that general direction, but when he reached the age of twelve to fifteen years, a most impressionable time, these more or less vague stories were given life and substance by rumors that barbaric hordes in great numbers were on their way south, destroying everything as they went, and that the stronger peoples were falling before them with seemingly no more successful resistance than the weaker. Let us try to get the setting still more specifically before us.

If Jeremiah, son of a loyal Hebrew family, and a lover of his people, at an age as young as twelve or fifteen years, heard repeated rumors of these bloodthirsty hordes coming down in such vast numbers from no one knew where, devastating all before them, caring even less for life than for property, and heading directly toward his own precious land, we may form some idea of the overwhelming impact of such an incident upon his nervous life and of the religious reaction it would entail. The days of "rumors of wars," imminent and momentarily expected, are never-to-be-forgotten days, even when the threatened encounter is to be between civilized peoples who go to war in thoroughly orderly fashion; but here is an event which has had but few equals in history in arousing terror and foreboding. To the religious mind it could appeal in no other light than as a direct judgment of God upon the nations, and he would indeed be a sanguine Jew who, in the face of such an impending danger, could calmly sit by and expect his small nation to be immune, especially when the mightier peoples fell helpless and cowering before such a foe.

It is not at all improbable that in these highly impressionable days, Jeremiah, as a mere boy, together with many other followers of the earlier prophets, learned to cast himself in utter helplessness and despair upon the God whom he knew to have so often protected and delivered his people in the past. Nor would it be strange if

this strain, nerve-racking and long continued, had much to do in producing the Jeremiah of later years with his excesses of moodiness and despair.

These stealthy riders finally came within the horizon. Media and Assyria fell a prey to them, and they were making their way down the sea-coast through Syria to Egypt. They might appear at the gates of Jerusalem any day, and no one could describe the abominations the holy city might undergo at their hands. But they rode by, and Jerusalem was left undisturbed in her lofty seat. In the meantime Jeremiah passed from childhood to young manhood, the age when a Jewish boy was expected to choose a vocation. It is an age when young men see visions of their possibilities today, and tomorrow despair of ever being anything but the most common and mediocre. We shall never be able to say with certainty that it was a wave of this Scythian movement, possibly more imminent than any before it, that pushed the young prophet out upon his stormy life-mission. Some such external stimulus as this is entirely compatible with, but not necessary to, the call-experience.[1] Suffice it to say, that the whole movement, when set in relation to other events and beliefs of the times, must have strongly impressed the young Jeremiah.

Probably the most important belief of the time, especially when viewed in the light of events, was the concept or doctrine of the "Day of Jahwe." Jeremiah nowhere specifically mentions this doctrine, but Zephaniah, his contemporary, shows plainly that such a teaching was current. From Amos on, there had been two contradictory interpretations of this coming event. Amos found among his contemporaries an attitude of careless, even bigoted ease, because they seemed to believe that they were soon

[1] Hosea was probably impelled to undertake his prophetic mission by the tragedy of his marital experience; this may be held true, even though we hold that he knew from the first what the consequences would be. The actual living through of these experiences taught him his message for his people. Though Amos reports visions that came to him, it is probable that the reflective element predominated in his call-experience. This seems true also in the case of Isaiah. All these prophets had a common incentive in the social and religious conditions of the times. It is evident from the history of religion on the higher intellectual plane, that there are two broad types of temperament, the reflective and the more objective or commonplace. Jeremiah seems to represent the latter type, but is not a pronounced example.

to enter upon, if indeed they were not already experiencing, a millennial age, called the day of Jahwe, an age of plenty and ease in which Jahwe would give to his people the desire of his heart and their hearts as well. It was to be essentially an epoch of unparalleled physical prosperity. The stern Amos with his keen ethical insight could not brook so superficial and degrading a doctrine. Jahwe's ideal of perfection and righteousness was something far other than the revel of those who were physically fat but morally depraved. The day of Jahwe will be a day of darkness, not of light, was his revolutionary retort to their self-satisfied refrain, "The Day of Jahwe, the Day of Jahwe." Amos here set the standard of thinking for the prophets who followed. Jahwe is no respecter of persons or of nations. His wrath and judgment are upon the sinful nation, whether it be Israel, Judah, or some nation outside the pale of special privilege. With this prophetic attitude toward the "Day of Jahwe" Jeremiah must have been acquainted from his earliest years. Zephaniah (vs. 15) reads, "That day is a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness," etc. For Zephaniah the day of Jahwe is to be a world-judgment in which Judah will by no means be spared. We can then scarcely conceive of Jeremiah being reared in an atmosphere where this idea of the day of Jahwe was not known, and furthermore he must have shared it, for from his very earliest ministry he does not fall one jot or tittle behind the most zealous prophet in preaching the judgment of Jahwe upon his sinful people. We have to do then with a young man who is brought up in a priestly family, but under the spell of the teaching of the great prophets; who lives in a dreary village just off the Jordan valley, but within easy reach of the capital city, the center of all Judah's activities; whose generation inherits all the pollutions and disastrous results of Manasseh's reign, for whom the day of Jahwe is to be a time of reckoning for the wicked generation in which he lived; and to crown all, giving specific and vital meaning to this combination of events, an unknown people of cruel propensities and insatiable appetite for blood and booty comes out of the mysterious north. Is not this people the direct and tangible form of the judgment so long foretold, yet ever unheeded, that

Jahwe is now to bring upon his people? Is there not now as in the past, a crying need that a prophet should arise to call his people, for the last time, to genuine and wholesale repentance? Who is better fitted for this exalted office than the heir of such conditions?

II. JEREMIAH'S CALL

Each of the greater prophets describes his call in a way that leaves no doubt of his consciousness of a distinct and unique experience. Whatever elements may have entered into his preparatory experiences, there comes a time when, in a moment of some sort of spiritual exaltation, an irresistible compulsion, which he interprets as from without and above himself, seizes him, overpowers his will, thwarts his better judgment, and sweeps him out into his great prophetic task with all its hardships and persecutions, and its promise of nothing better than doubtful success, when judged by any ordinary standards. To these experiences Jeremiah was no exception but rather, in many ways, their most striking fulfilment. The facts of the call-incident are very simply related in chap. 1. The prophet hears the word of Jahwe, saying to him that he has been prenatally destined a prophet to the nations. The prophet reverentially replies, pleading his youth and inexperience. He is immediately reassured that this great personal power which is compelling him to his task will protect and deliver him in every emergency. The divine hand touches his lips and an accompanying voice says, "Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth; . . . . I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down and to destroy and to overthrow (to build and to plant)!" Then immediately follow the two visions of the almond tree and the boiling caldron.

These statements must now be the subject of psychological interpretation. It is evident that Jeremiah was yet a youth, quite certainly not more than twenty-five years of age, and more probably between the years of eighteen and twenty-two. Furthermore, the young prophet is now, and probably not now for the first time, clearly convinced of a prenatal preparation for his office. However indistinct these tinglings of conscience may have been in his earlier years, in this moment of exaltation and spiritual stress these feel-

ings, half-suppressed and but half-understood, come out to clear expression. As a youth, just out of the later adolescent years and just on the brink of maturing manhood, he now feels driven to face honestly and fearlessly the question of a life work. He approaches this hour the more tremblingly, for he is practically certain of the outcome. There is but one thing for him to do. He understands now, as he could not do hitherto, how all the influences in his life have converged upon this moment. There has been an ordering hand in his life, which began its task before he was born, and through twenty years of childhood and youth has been molding him to become what he now unmistakably finds himself called to be. Is it any wonder that he shrinks back for the moment, forgetting that manhood's responsibilities have arrived? In the great illumination that floods his inner life, the obstacles and oppositions, as well as the satisfactions, are magnified. But his hesitation is only for a moment. Neither youth nor cowardice can serve as a legitimate excuse. His sensitive, retiring nature may shrink back from the task, but his will must bravely take up the burden, and count no excuse sufficient to relieve him of this responsibility. So powerful and vivid is the impression that the prophet can best represent it, naïvely or figuratively, as the divine hand touching his lips and placing thereon the message he is to utter. The form of this figure may be borrowed from Isaiah, but the essence of it is far different. Jeremiah seems not to have been conscious of the need of any ceremonial cleansing, as was Isaiah, before the great and holy God. He needed only to be endowed with a message, the unfolding and propagation of which would occupy his time and energies for life.

His mission is to the nations, if we may follow the text. At first thought, this seems a much larger conception of his field of activity than Isaiah and Amos had of theirs. They nowhere state or even imply that they felt called to deal with people outside their own; but as a matter of fact they lived in a time when people were restless and changing, and they could not deal with their own people, their history, and their destiny, without putting them in their international setting. Both these great prophets were statesmen in the better sense of the word. Amos understood the history

of many peoples and seemed to have a judgment of historical events quite unbiased for a man of his day. Isaiah had rather a complex political situation to fathom, but he seemed to comprehend the broader movements of nations and he did not lose sight of these in Judah's imminent political dangers.

But Judah was now much more cosmopolitan than either Judah or Israel could have been in Isaiah's day. Assyria had manifested her power in Syria and Palestine for nearly a century. During all this time Egypt had stood ready, when not entirely at the mercy of the power on the Euphrates, to incite the small Syrian kingdoms to rebellion and to proffer them doubtful assistance. Now there were signs that Assyria was weakening and Babylonia was taking a new hold on life. New nations were arising in the north, the northeast, and the northwest, and pushing south with considerable show of success against the more effete peoples.

The history of Israel had its lessons for those in Judah who were sober enough to heed them. Verily, Jeremiah was to be a prophet to the nations, for his nation was more intimately a part of great world-movements than ever before. In the light of Zephaniah's world-judgment, may Jeremiah not have had some similar idea of the coming day of Jahwe, even though he became at once so absorbed in his duty to his own people that this overtowered his broader and less pressing mission? Many of his descriptions of the wholesale destruction that is to come from the north are capable of a very broad application. Jeremiah, then, did just what any broad-minded and far-seeing statesman would do: he bade his people cease their temporizing policy and study the signs of the times, and choose wisely the course they would follow.

But what is to be the prophet's message to the nations, including his own? Zephaniah gives us at least one clue. The condition of the times was such that a Hebrew prophet must have in his message the strongly destructive note. The preaching of the earlier great prophets would lead us to the same result. Hence, we may feel certain that from the very first Jeremiah felt called "to pluck up and to break down and to destroy and to overthrow." He had brooded long enough over the deplorable state of affairs, socially

and politically as well as morally, to feel this message clear. But was he "to build and to plant" as well, and if so, in what sense could a mission of this sort extend its effects to the nations beyond his own?

The manuscript evidence for the retention of these words in the text is almost unanimous. This does not preclude the possibility that one of the several redactors of Jeremiah added them, in order to soften the effect of the extremely harsh combination of words immediately preceding. If, as some scholars hold, there was a time, exilic or post-exilic, when the writings of the great prophets were subjected to this sort of treatment to make them more tolerable and constructive, Jeremiah must have suffered change, along with the others.

When we examine the Book of Jeremiah as a whole, with this point in mind, it is difficult to find anything hopeful or constructive until after the first captivity has taken place. In the earlier portions of the book covering the report of only four or five years at the beginning of his ministry, taking the text as it now stands, there are two or three brief hints at the hope of a remnant, but it is by no means certain that these are original. The great central portion of his prophetic career is somber with the clouds of despair of any redemption for the nation.

Thus it is reasonable to suppose that this constructive phase of his message was a later induction, arrived at some time before 605 when the roll was prepared. Psychologically, it is much more probable that this was, to his mind, a part of his original commission, for no young man starts out upon some great moral task prepossessed with the assurance of total defeat; rather does he sanguinely expect some considerable measure of success. Thus it is quite possible that when he received his call and commission, Jeremiah saw clearly that there must be the preaching of severe judgment as the earliest and dominant note of his message, but he must have hoped that, after this most arduous and disagreeable task had been faithfully completed, there would be constructive results, and that at least a remnant of his own nation would return unto Jahwe. It is doubtful whether Jeremiah's vision of the future

included other nations in the scope of this more hopeful result of his ministry, as it must have included them more or less vitally in the expectation of a general judgment for evil.

Immediately following the record of the call-experience there are set forth two visions which came to Jeremiah, no doubt soon after, and probably in close connection with, the call. At any rate there is no psychological difficulty in placing them here. After such an awakening the prophet's mind is virgin soil, fitted to receive any further light on his new and as yet somewhat obscure path of duty. His naturally contemplative mood is now even more impressionable. He sees an almond tree, the first of the trees to awake in response to springtime's touch. Here and there an early blossom is already visible. The name of the tree (*shākēd*="almond tree") suggests a line of thought which in these days is uppermost in his mind. There is One (*shôkēd*) "watching" over his word to perform it, even as he is in control of the seasons, and is the revivifying force in each new springtime. This plainly indicates the prophet's sympathy with nature and his keen response to its impact upon his senses. Just as the barren heated season makes one's soul feel like a parched field, so the freshness of spring revives and stirs to new activity the higher emotions of poet and genius.

But just as the first so-called vision presents in homely symbolic form the more positive and pleasing side of the prophetic experience, viz., that Jahwe will guide and guard his servant at every step, so the second vision gives in a no less simple picture the more somber side of the prophet's duty, viz., the proclamation of judgment, speedy and terrible, upon his own people. Jeremiah sees a boiling caldron, tipping from the north and pouring its seething contents upon the people of the south. Out of the mysterious north are to come all its kingdoms to encamp before Jerusalem and the cities of Judah. This is to be the penalty for apostasy and idolatry. Jeremiah is no longer cast down by such a task. A new trust seems to seize him. The least that he can do is to be true to his deeper and more vigorous self. He now prefers the enmity of his fellow-men to the disapproval of the One who watches over him and provides strength. It is the story, so often repeated, of a great conception lending vigor and courage to the most difficult

undertaking. He can now conceive of himself as a fortified city, an iron pillar, and a wall of brass.[1]

The most searching test comes when the young prophet fully realizes how thoroughly his duty will divorce him from his people and make him their outspoken, bitter enemy. He is to stand "against the whole land of Judah, king—princes—priests—and people," "and they shall fight against thee."[2] Not a friend or follower is to be his, among all the better classes of Judah. To a man of sensitive, even passionate, fellow-feeling, one who cherishes a warm place in the affections of his people, such a test, coming at the very opening of his career, is not an easy one. In another sense, Jeremiah must be a fortified city, a citadel, impregnable to the compromises dictated by his natural and fallible love for his people, a wall of brass, withstanding all the swayings of instinctive human feelings. He must now slink away to his watch-tower and, so long as life shall last, preserve a voluntary confinement, counting those who by any natural standards would be his bosom friends, to be his sworn enemies. As a compensation for all this sacrifice, there comes to him the assurance, the only one that can soothe and satisfy, "but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with

[1] These two visions are to be interpreted alike. Whether they are genuine vision or not it may be impossible to decide. Psychologically, they are quite explicable on purely natural grounds, and our general interpretation of Jeremiah favors this view. There is a great temptation for psychology to attempt this natural interpretation of all vision, but such a procedure is not necessary, and it is in great danger of not being scientific. However, in the case of these visions of Jeremiah, their basis is so simple and natural that the simplest explanation seems the best. The prophet's mind is alert to receive materials for the message which the call has imposed upon him. These are suggested to him even by the routine occurrences of the day.

[2] Our interpretation of Jeremiah's state of mind is here complicated by the condition of the sources. Since he did not reduce his materials to writing until after he had passed through many of these hardships, it is perfectly possible to hold that he read back his later experiences into these earlier times. However, there is certainly another alternative here. Jeremiah must have known well the persecutions through which the earlier prophets had to pass, so that this knowledge was an important part of his mental furnishing at the time of his call. Further than this, he was able to see that the prophetic manner of viewing the conditions of the times—a point of view which he had inherited—was diametrically opposed to that of the ruling classes. By a little reflection he could easily arrive at the conclusion that, if he would live up to his ideal, he must sooner or later clash with these various classes.

thee to deliver thee." In the greater triumph and its resultant joy the lesser defeat with its accompanying bitterness is abrogated.

So far as the thought content of Jeremiah's call is concerned, we find no great difference between him and Isaiah and Amos. While the historical setting for him is different, it is yet very similar and involves the same mental reaction. Possibly in the time of Jeremiah the issue is more distinctly drawn, but this seeming fact may be explained on the grounds that Jeremiah put his materials together much later and may have given them a tinge of definiteness born of the facts as they actually came to pass.

In two minor points Jeremiah differs from the other prophets: in the consciousness of prenatal ordination, in which he is followed by the great New Testament hero, Saul of Tarsus, and in that he at least twice in chap. 1 is said to have been vouchsafed divine encouragement and protection, when he was on the point of shrinking back from the hard task imposed upon him. Jeremiah's later experiences confirm this temperamental trait of discouragement and flinching under fire. Amos seems never to have resisted his call when once the logic of events had led him to see his duty clearly, and Isaiah was so transformed by his majestic vision and so relieved by the consciousness of purification from sin, that when a call came in the most general terms, he at once volunteered for the thankless task of preaching destruction to a people hardened in heart and unable to believe. But Jeremiah was more matter-of-fact. In this he resembled Amos, but lacked his iron will. He had not in his make-up enough of the mystical, the idealistic, to keep him above the moods of discouragement and despair arising from contact with the cruel facts of the work-a-day world. He was crushed by what he was helpless to correct and had no resource, no power, within himself, by virtue of which to rise above circumstances. Hence in such seasons of despair his help must come from without and above himself. What he interpreted as fresh infusions of divine power was all that kept him to the end.

But when we come to consider the form in which the call-experience clothes itself, we have in many ways a severe contrast between Isaiah and Jeremiah. Jeremiah resembles Amos in that his language is simple, unfigurative, almost prosaic. But through-

out the range of Isaiah's writings there is no passage more figurative and grandiloquent than chap. 6, in which he describes his call. We need not heighten this contrast by bringing in the fantastic machinery of Ezekiel's call. Amos was driven to his task by the logic of righteousness. Hosea, out of the well-nigh divine tenacity of his own human love, saw Jahwe's unadulterated love for a wayward people. Isaiah, with his glowing imagination, sees the Holy God entering his temple with all the accompaniments which contribute to his glory; in violent contrast to this is the uncleanness of himself and his people. Here is the psychological element, constituting the basis for his call.

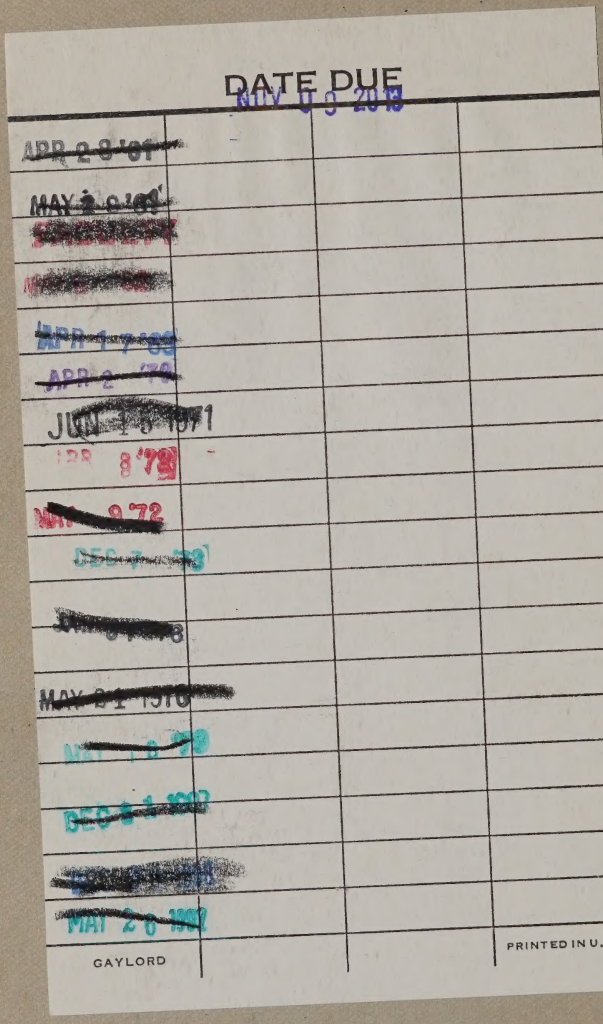
Less spectacular and less literary than any of these, though by no means devoid of dramatic power, is the call of Jeremiah. Not "Jahwe appeared unto me," or "Jahwe took me," but "The word of Jahwe came unto me saying, I have appointed thee a prophet." To this appointment there is no denial, though the prophet is allowed to interpose his valid objections. Then comes the vivid touch, "I have put my words in thy mouth," and the prophet feels the touch of the divine hand upon his lips.

Here we come nearest to Isaiah, but the similarity is more in form than in essence. The cleansing from sin in Isaiah's case was accomplished by a coal from the altar, applied to the lips by one of the fiery attendants of Jahwe. The activity was purely ceremonial. But Jeremiah is conscious of no sin and no need of ceremonial or symbolical cleansing. His conception of religion is too much an ethical one to be satisfied with ceremony, however grand and imposing. No sort of mediation is required to prepare Jeremiah for direct personal contact with his God. Inexorable law stands between Amos and his God; ineffable holiness between Isaiah and his God; but Jeremiah, much more in the spirit of Hosea, rends all veils and sees face to face and experiences heart to heart.

There may be in such a conception, a touch of mysticism, but no mechanics of vision or audition. Jeremiah, least of all the prophets, can be accused of harking back to the earlier, more superficial forms of prophetic experience. Nor do the two visions that accompany the call lay him open to the charge of imitation. Both of these lessons are suggested to him by simple phenomena in the

everyday world. Later in his ministry his lessons come in the same way. The linen girdle, the potter's vessel, the yokes of wood and iron are striking instances. To explain such experiences we do not need vision or ecstasy, but keen powers of observation, a deep ethical insight, and a broad, well-balanced conception of moral causality in the affairs of the universe. We must conclude, then, much as we might desire not to do so, that in Jeremiah, the matter-of-fact, the rational predominate over the poetic and the mystical. "He was a nature characterized by simplicity, reality, pathos, tenderness, and a strange piety, but subject to his emotions, which were liable to rise into passions. His mind was set on a minor key and his temper was elegiac. And to all this his language was true."[1]

[1] Davidson, article on "Jeremiah" in *HDB*.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